

Grand Plans: Business Progressivism and Social Change in Ohio's Miami Valley, 1890-1929

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Grand Plans: Business Progressivism and Social Change in Ohio's Miami Valley, 1890-1929, by Judith Sealander. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988. viii, 263 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$26.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MAUREEN OGLE, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

In *Grand Plans* Judith Sealander focuses on the Progressive Era as it was played out in the Dayton, Ohio, area. Her aims are twofold: first, to look anew at the complex relationship between Progressivism and business; and second, to examine that relationship from the perspective of a medium-sized city. Such cities were more typical than New York, Boston, or Chicago, and "probably were the real crucibles for progressive reform" (12). The Dayton area's relatively small cast of characters allowed her to reach deep into the heart of the Progressive period by studying closely the attitudes and activities of one business community and the surrounding community's response to it.

The historiography of the Progressive Era, the author notes, generally casts the business community as either hero or villain. Either "the people" rose up against the abuses of the corporation, or business leaders themselves manipulated people in a conspiracy aimed at "corporatizing" the nation. These either/or interpretations, argues Sealander, obscure the complexity of business's relations with the larger community, a dangerous fault since "to understand progressivism one must understand business's relationship with progressivism" (10).

Sealander attempts to clear the haze by focusing on the players and events surrounding four characteristically Progressive movements: John Patterson's employee welfare programs at National Cash Register Company in Dayton; the massive flood relief and flood prevention plans instituted in the Miami valley between 1913 and about 1921; the introduction of city manager government to Dayton; and the public and private "educational engineering" programs in the Dayton area. These four dramas, enacted over a period of years and involving a wide spectrum of the Miami valley-Dayton community, provided a valuable opportunity to examine a Progressive-era business community in a relatively small setting.

Sealander succeeds admirably in her aims. What emerges in *Grand Plans* is a rich drama of real people arguing about and acting toward real social change. At the center of her study is a small but forceful group of Ohio business Progressives with one foot in each camp: they were hard-nosed businessmen concerned with economic growth and efficiency whose moral fervor and optimism fired their visions for social change. Motivated by self-interest, by idealism, by

honest altruism and hungry egos, each of her characters stands ultimately as a man of his times, when the "Progressive" spirit dictated the actions of ordinary people. Thus, argues Sealander, the "grand plans" conceived and carried out by the Dayton business community in the early twentieth century were neither public relations posturing designed to dupe the public, nor were they entirely altruistic. Rather, a genuine desire for reform—and an equally strong desire to achieve results—permeated these Ohioans as they sought to maximize the potential of the Miami valley and its citizens by making it a model of change and reform.

By its very nature this is a small book with limited aims, and that trait creates the book's one failing: Sealander's carefully ordered limitations constrain a potentially richer analysis. She often refers to—but never fully discusses—two important side issues. One is the nature of democracy and the ways in which local Progressives tampered with its meaning and structure in the name of reform and efficiency. In Dayton the "democratic process" lay at the heart of an intense political struggle between the business community and its opponents. Sealander's brief, almost casual, mention of the consequences of that struggle leaves the reader begging for a larger discussion. The second issue involves the role of women in the community's Progressive movement. Sealander repeatedly claims that Dayton Progressives deliberately eliminated women from the reform scene, but her rather vague references to the subject fail to substantiate her argument.

Even those shortcomings, however, do not detract from the book's merits. *Grand Plans* is a well-written, well-organized, and carefully researched work that takes the complexity of the Progressive Era out of the big city and places it in the Midwest, and in the process raises important questions worthy of further study.

Art and Popular Religion in Evangelical America, 1915–1940, by Robert L. Gambone. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989. xvii, 278 pp. Color plates, figures, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ERLING JORSTAD, ST. OLAF COLLEGE

Here is a major breakthrough in the intricate world of interdisciplinary studies: a splendid study of how American painters, both well known and obscure, portrayed the prevailing folk and popular themes in American religion in the interwar years. Originally a doctoral dissertation in art history and American studies at the University of Minnesota, this work has been enlarged to demonstrate the deli-

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